

Art in America

David Hammons Curates Edward Clark

By Brian Boucher

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Artist David Hammons has curated "Big Bang," a show of gestural, explosively colorful paintings by the relatively little-known African-American artist Edward Clark, now on view at New York's Tilton Gallery (through Feb. 22). An Abstract-Expressionist painter who frequented the Tenth Street scene and the Cedar Tavern, Clark, 87, continues to paint at his New York studio.

"David collects Ed's work," Jack Tilton told *A.i.A.* by phone, "and he knows everyone in the African-American art world, which is a very small place, though it's bigger now than it's ever been."



Ed Clark, *Untitled*, 2001

Clark typically paints on the floor, often pouring his acrylics or employing tools such as brooms to apply his paint. "Big Bang" is his first exhibition in New York since 2006. The show includes eight large paintings dating from 2001 and after and one from 1959. The artist is under-recognized compared to three artists who are or were friends of Clark's and who are each represented by one work in the show—Donald Judd, Yayoi Kusama and Joan Mitchell. He is also the first artist to create a shaped canvas, in 1956, according to the gallery.

"Black artists like Sam Gilliam and Jack Whitten are now getting a lot of play," Tilton said. "The whiteness of the art world hasn't let a lot of this work appear earlier. Norman Lewis was best friends with Ad Reinhardt, but we have only seen his work prominently recently. There's a lot of racial and cultural meshing in the '40s, the '50s and the '70s that not a lot of people write about."

Clark's work is included in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the Detroit Art Institute and the Studio Museum in Harlem. "Blues for Smoke," a traveling exhibition that appeared at New York's Whitney Museum of American Art in 2013, also featured the artist. He has appeared in a number of historic exhibitions as well, including the 1973 Whitney Biennial. Clark does not currently have gallery representation.

Born in New Orleans in 1926, Clark served in World War II and lived in Paris in the '50s, where he was exposed to the work of French abstract painters like Jean Paul Riopelle, Georges Mathieu and Pierre Soulages. He credits Nicolas de Stael as a major influence.